

As I prepared for this service I thought about your expectations and what I should do to meet them, such as what I should wear. I thought shoes and socks would be a good place to start, a clean shirt and pants too. But think about it. If I'd shown up in boxer shorts and a top hat, I'm certain this would've been our last Sunday together! You had expectations.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians he talked about his expectations about how the people ought to live. That's what we're going to talk about this morning: Expectations.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18**

**Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the Word of Life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.**

Paul began by addressing WHOSE expectations we're answering to. He wrote, **"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."**

Paul was saying, if you were on your best behavior for me, even more so you should be on your best behavior for God. In other words, how we live is even more important to God than it is to other people. After all, God knows our motives.

Indeed, God has expectations, and we should be conscious of them, and we should try to fulfill them. That's what Paul's saying.

But I can already hear you moaning, "I'm not saved by works." But Paul did tell us to "**work out your salvation with fear and trembling,**" didn't he?

When he said that, he was saying, "Look, we've all got issues, issues in our own hearts, problems with faithlessness, temptation, and fear, and we've all got issues with the world, a world that doesn't believe, a world that's hurting, a world that's filled with darkness all around.

Indeed, there is much fear and trembling in our lives amidst "**a crooked and twisted generation,**" things that would steal away our joy and confidence in the Lord. Incidentally, there's as much darkness in each generation represented here today as in any other generation that has ever lived. So we can't pin this on the Millennials!

Daily, we fight against the threats to our faith which come from inside our own heart and which come from outside of us. That's what Paul meant when he said to work out our salvation with "**fear and trembling.**" And we are engaged in this spiritual battle, the Scripture reads, for God's "**good pleasure.**"

On the one hand, it sounds strange to say that God would take pleasure in anything we do. No other religion is bold enough to make such a claim. But it is true. Thus Paul tells us to, "**Do all things without grumbling or questioning.**"

It is a disease, grumbling and complaining, whining about things we have no control over, for it eats away at our sense of gratefulness for God's gifts.

And consider what it does to our witness. We can spend all day telling people about God's love, about Christ's death on the Cross for our sins, and his resurrection from the grave and eternal life, but if all we do is complain, worry, grumble and whine, who'll take to heart a single word we say? We don't believe it ourselves when we're filled with such bitterness.

Indeed, when we spend our time complaining we're not letting God be God. It's as if we're saying, "I don't really believe God can help me." But there is a better way. We can discern what we can change and what we can't, and leave the difference in God's hands. The Serenity Prayer is my favorite example of what this looks like devotionally:

**God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.  
Amen.**

What would the Christian church look like today if we all stopped complaining, if there was no more whining about music, about leadership, and about cold coffee? What if we replaced our complaints with words of encouragement, words of love, words of gratitude, if we strove to be a part of the solution instead of a part of the problem? This might be enough to change the world.

Paul wrote, **"Do all things without crumbling or complaining 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life...."**

Just as the moon reflects the light of the Sun as it revolves around it, so too we reflect the light of the Son of God as our lives revolve around him. That's what Paul meant when he wrote that we **"shine as lights in the world."**

Luther said that if God had only wanted to save our souls he'd have sucked us up into heaven after our Baptisms. But he didn't. He saved us and then he equipped us to take the same Good News that saved us to the world, a world that is dying, drowning in heartache, misery and fear.

Children learn how to behave by watching their parents. That's what children do. They look at them and then they imitate them. (I hope this is not a surprise to us!) Children of God reflect the heavenly Father's glory when they learn the character of his son, Jesus, and then follow him.

The Lord Jesus gave himself to us in so many ways, first at the Cross and then in Baptism. And we continue to receive him in His Supper, and through the Absolution, and through the study of his Word. And the result is that we begin to look like him a little bit more every day, a people filled with the fruit of his Spirit, his **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).**

We’re challenged, challenged to make ends meet, resist temptation, and keep the faith. Our boss is on our back, our mortgage is upside-down, our parent is sick, and so on. We’re challenged. But that’s no reason to grumble. For we have the Lord, and he holds us in the palm of his hand, and he’s filled our hearts with peace and with assurance of salvation unto eternity. He’s given us the **“Word of Life”** to sustain us.

Friends in Christ, if we can rest in this truth, if we can allow it to percolate inside of us, to meditate on it, if we can let God be God and be content with what we have and who we are in Him, we’ll no longer have any need to grumble, but we’ll shine as lights in this world, holding fast to the Word of Life.

Jesus is this Word. He’s the way, the truth, and the life, our life, my life, your life, showing us the way, filling us with confidence, sweeping away our fears, giving us a new perspective, and blessing us with a peace in our hearts that no one can take away.

Brothers and sisters, the world is everything outside of this grace. It is the place where fear reigns supreme. It is Syria, and North Korea, and Iran; it is American vigilantes armed to the teeth. In these places there’s no love, no hope. But there is only fear. This is the living death.

But the Lord has made you and me to shine as lights in this world, to live in his love, a love that he first poured down from the Cross. This is our hope, and this is the hope we are called to provide to a dying world.

But to do this, first, we must stop grumbling and complaining, and the best place to start is with prayer. Let’s say the Serenity Prayer together. Please repeat after me:

**God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.  
Amen.**

This week may you be strengthened in your life as you hold “fast to the Word of life,” for this Word is the fountainhead of our lives in Christ our Savior.

This week may you be encouraged in your own heart not to complain or grumble but to give thanks for all things.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.